

# Seattle febnet

Vol. 16, Num.2

From Your Federal Executive Board

March – April 2002

## CHAIR'S CORNER

By Larry Andriesen



### Recognizing Your Brightest and Best Employees!!!!

The Seattle Federal Executive Board is currently soliciting agencies for nominations for this year's Public Service Celebration. Our awards program is all inclusive to recognize as many federal employees as we can for their outstanding accomplishments to their agency or their community. Wednesday, May 15, 2002 is the day set aside to gather in the North and South Auditorium of the Jackson Federal Building to celebrate the success of those who have chosen a career in Public Service.

We strive to make the nomination process as simple as possible. We are looking for employees who are innovative, creative and hard working. The recognition is reserved for employees whose contribution is truly significant and special - above and beyond what is expected day-to-day.

Specifically we ask that agencies ensure nominations fit the following criteria: extraordinary contributions to the accomplishment of the agency's mission, extraordinary contributions that have resulted in

a significant cost savings, extraordinary contributions which have substantially improved customer service or contributions off the job which have resulted in a significant impact to the community at large.

Agencies must limit their number of nominations to 5% of their total workforce. Selection process is at the discretion of the participating agencies and may include nominations from supervisors and peers. All nominations received will be recognized for their accomplishments and will not go through an additional selection process. Nominations should be fifty words or less and must be submitted to the SFEB no later than Friday, April 12, 2002.

This Celebration has become one of the most successful events of our year. I invite you to submit your truly outstanding employees to be recognized and share in one of the highlights of the federal community. I look forward to hearing from every agency in the Puget Sound commuting area to help us celebrate all the good work from within the federal community.

THE U.S. SAVINGS BONDS

*EasySaver*<sup>TM</sup>  
P L A N

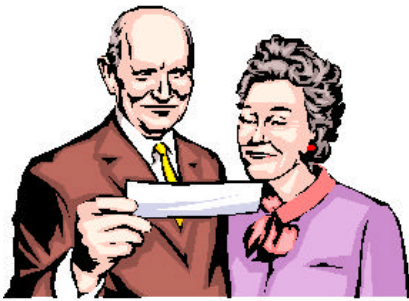
*Saving Money Just Got Easier*

# Accent on Agencies



## Social Security Administration

For over 65 years the Social Security program has been the most successful domestic government program, providing economic protection for Americans of all ages. Demographic changes confronting our Nation require the need for reforms in the Social Security program. Americans must understand the Social Security program of today, so they can make informed choices about the Social Security program of tomorrow.



Social Security works because it speaks to a universal human need. All people throughout human history have faced the uncertainties

brought on by death, disability and old age. Prior to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of people in the United States lived and worked on farms and economic security was provided by the extended family. However, this arrangement changed as America underwent the Industrial Revolution. The extended family and the family farm as sources of economic security became less common. Then, the Great Depression triggered a crisis in the nation's economic life. It was against the backdrop that the Social Security Act emerged.

There have been many additions to the initial Social Security Act of 1934. A committee was convened to study the entire problem of economic insecurity and to make recommendations that would serve as the basis for legislative consideration by the Congress.



The act provided for general welfare and created a social insurance program designed to pay retired workers age 65 or older a continuing income after retirement.

Amendments were added in the years to follow. The original Act provided only retirement benefits, and only to the worker. Two new categories were added in 1939. Payments to the spouse and minor children of a retired worker and survivors benefits paid to the family in the event of the premature death of the worker. Thus, Social Security was transformed from a retirement program for individuals into a family based economic security program. Cost of Living increases followed along with disability benefits permitting disabled workers under age 50 and their dependents to qualify for benefits and eventually disabled workers at any age could qualify.



Medicare was added in the 60's followed by Supplemental Security Income. The next two decades brought more changes and with the 80's the program faced a serious financing crisis. The Greenspan Commission studied the financing issues and made recommendations for legislative changes. The final bill made changes in the Social Security and Medicare programs, including the taxation of Social Security benefits; the first coverage of federal employees; raising the retirement age and increasing the reserves in the Social Security Trust Funds.

During the 1990's, Social Security faced long-term challenges. The 2000 Trustees Report stated Social Security could pay full benefits until 2037, but the standard 75-year test of actuarial balance was not met.

Social Security has grown to become an essential facet of modern life. One in six Americans receives a Social Security benefit, and about 98 percent of all workers are in jobs covered by Social Security. Social Security benefits comprise about 5% of the nation's total economic output. From 1940, when slightly more than 222,000 people received monthly Social Security benefits, until today, when almost 45 million people receive such benefits, Social Security has grown steadily. And, Social Security benefits provide income security not just to the elderly. Nearly 1 in 3 beneficiaries are not retirees.

## Government Accounting Office Administration

If someone mentions "Congress," you immediately think of the *other* Washington—the one on the East Coast. But Congress has a presence in the Northwest, too. Besides the home-based staffs of the state's senators and House members, there's another group—the 70-plus staff members in the Seattle Office of the United States General Accounting Office.

Similarly, if someone mentions the General Accounting Office, you might immediately think "accountants." You would be right, but only partly right. GAO's mandate as a congressional oversight agency is to look at all aspects of government performance, not just the books. Although you will find a number of Certified Public Accountants on the Seattle staff, most GAO employees have expertise in other areas.

GAO stands apart from nearly every other source of information about federal programs in its ability to gather reliable information first-hand, no matter what the subject, situation, or location. GAO analysts and auditors are the "eyes and ears" for the Congress wherever federal programs and dollars go—to defense contractors, health centers, national parks and forests, job training programs, and thousands of federal installations throughout the country.

As one of GAO's 11 field offices, the Seattle Office puts staff close to federal activities in the Pacific Northwest. Much of the staff's work focuses on the activities that are particularly important to this region, such as nuclear waste cleanup, aviation, public lands, national parks, fisheries, and port development. The Office also has specialists in such subjects as health policy, education, and financial management.

In recent months, Seattle GAO staff have addressed such topics as the Army's development of a totally new rapid response capability at Fort Lewis, aviation trends in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and federal assistance to local emergency medical response efforts. GAO conducts its studies at the request of congressional committees and individual members of the Senate and House. The aim of these studies is to provide this audience with first-hand information about what federal programs are accomplishing. Such information becomes all the more important as the federal government continues to explore ways to pass decision-making authority to state and local governments.



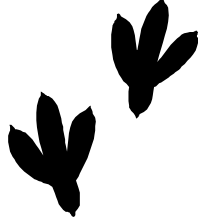
Seattle Office staff are involved in all phases of producing these reports, including designing the assignment, collecting and assembling the information, and writing the final product. They design questionnaires, develop and carry out complex study methodologies, conduct field visits, and testify before the Congress. Most staff members have master's degrees; some have doctorates. The Office's core values are

centered on enhancing accountability in government, doing work in accordance with the highest standards of professional integrity, and producing reliable information for the Congress and the American public.

Seattle staff have gathered information by bush plane and snowmobile as well as by computer, survey, and telephone. One staff member, working on an assignment that involved health services being provided to Alaska Natives, recounts taking off from an isolated airstrip somewhere in Alaska's far western region. As the plane climbed and banked steeply back to the east, the pilot pointed out the window and said, "See that land over there? That's Siberia." Whatever it takes!



## **FEDERAL FOOTSTEPS**



### **GSA Offers a Free Trial at Telecommuting Centers**

Federal employees who have yet to experience telecommuting now have a 60-day window of opportunity to try working from a telecommuting center, courtesy of GSA. In a letter to OPM Director Kay Coles James and the heads of all agencies and departments, GSA Administrator Stephen Perry offered a free 60-day trial period for employees approved to work at a telecommuting center for the first time. The offer is good until June 30.

Though telecommuting has long been recognized as a recruitment and retention tool, a means of boosting employee morals and productivity, and a way of reducing absenteeism, the idea has been slow to catch on in the federal government. As of November, 4.2 percent of federal workers participated in telecommuting programs.

## **Long Term Care Insurance**

The US Office of Personnel Management is sponsoring a high quality long-term care insurance program for members of the federal family. They contracted with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and John Hancock Life Insurance Company, who have come together at LTC Partners to provide this insurance.



The long-term care insurance program is not available yet, but it will be soon. There will be an early enrollment opportunity from March 25 through May 15 and an open season from July 1 through December 31, 2002.

Over the next several months, you will see a number of different initiatives to educate the federal family about long term care and long term care insurance. Satellite broadcasts for all employees will be one means of communicating information, along with training sessions and printed materials.

### **HHS Begins Sending out Bio-terrorism Funds**

The federal government began sending out 20 percent of the \$1.1 billion in federal funding for state and local Bio-terrorism preparation for fiscal 2002, according to health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. Hospitals, laboratories and first responders will begin to receive \$220 million of the funds while the remaining \$880 million is to be distributed in the Spring. Starting March 15, state and local recipients are to begin presenting plans on how to spend the money, plans which need to be approved by their governors, then the health and Human Services Department.



## **Civil Service Annuity Monthly Payment Statement is Available Online**

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) now offers a web site providing information to recipients receiving benefits under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or FERS Special, or the Organization Retirement and Disability System (ORDS).

To use the website, you need your "CSA" or "CSF" claim number and a Personal Identification Number (PIN) issued to you by OPM. It is the same number you use for the automated self-service telephone system. If you do not have a PIN, call OPM to request one be sent to you. The nationwide toll-free number is 1-88USOPMRET.

The website can be used to:

- ⌘ **start, change or stop federal and state income tax withholdings;**
- ⌘ **buy, change, or stop savings bonds;**
- ⌘ **request a duplicate tax filing statement (1099R);**
- ⌘ **change your Personal Identification Number (PIN) for accessing automated systems;**
- ⌘ **establish, change, or stop an allotment to an organization;**
- ⌘ **change your mailing address;**
- ⌘ **start direct deposit of your payment or change the account or financial institution to which your payment is sent; and establish, change, or stop a checking or savings allotment**
- ⌘ **view a statement describing your annuity payment.**

## **Federal Employee Education & Assistance Fund (FEEA) Scholarships Due by March 29, 2002**

FEEA has awarded over \$2.75 million in college scholarships exclusively to federal and postal employees and their family members.

The FEEA scholarship program is sponsored in part by the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Association, which provides at least one special distinction scholarship in each of FEEA's 26 regions. Other corporate sponsors include FPMI. The majority of funding for the program comes from federal employee contributions to FEEA Pledge #2808 during the CFC.

FEEA scholarship application are available from January through March each year. Applications are available on the website and are due back at FEEA headquarters by the end of March each year. Awards are announced in August in time for the fall school term and are paid in two installments - half in August/September and the balance in December/January. Awards generally range from \$300 to \$1500.

Eligible applicants include current civilian federal and postal employees with at least three years of federal service and their dependent family members (children and spouses). Employee applicants may be part-time students, dependents must be full-time. All applicants must be enrolled or plan to enroll in an accredited post secondary school in a course of study that will lead to a two-year, four-year or graduate degree. All applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale.

Download the requirements for the scholarship application for the FEEA website. A typed, double-spaced essay not exceeding two pages on

The febnet  
Is Published By The  
Seattle Federal Executive Board

Lawrence B. Andriesen, SFEB Chair  
Anne M. Tiernan, Executive Director

Seattle Federal Executive Board  
915 Second Avenue, Room 2942  
Seattle, WA 98174  
(206) 220-6171 FAX (206) 220-6132  
Internet sfef@mindspring.com  
Homepage <http://www.seattle.feb.gov>

the topic: "How can the government balance the need for increased security with the freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights?" along with application requirements. Applications must be postmarked by March 29, 2002.

### **Cheney Unveils Redesigned FirstGov**

Vice President Dick Cheney unveiled a redesigned First Gov Web site, a new version of the federal government's online public point of entry for information and services. Cheney said the new site is an attempt to remedy the slowness and inefficiency of many government services, which he called "one of government's oldest problems."

The new site has a user-friendly design intended to get visitors to the information they need in three mouse clicks or less. The site is divided into categories of interest for citizens, businesses and other governments. Among other changes, users can now readily find information about Social Security payments, register for the Selective Service and access an index of federal agencies.

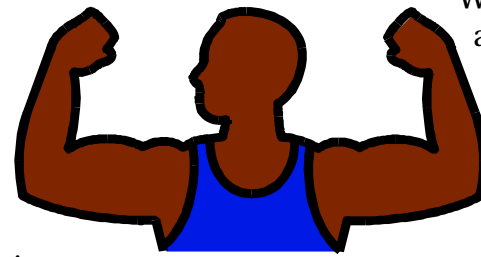


### **Seattle FEB Happenings**

#### **Fitness Center Offers Free Week**

The Fitness Center is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Jackson Federal building. It is open Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. The Center offers a full range of cardiovascular equipment including Precor elliptical trainers, treadmills, recumbent bikes, upright bikes, rowers, Stairmasters and a Gravitron; a complete weight room with a Smith machine,

universal gym, bench press, leg press, a broad range of free weights; a 1200 square foot aerobics floor where classes are scheduled Monday through Friday including Step combo, Weighted workout, Yoga, Low impact,



Washboard abs and Jazzercise Lite. We also offer a variety of tubing, j u m p ropes, medicine balls, stability balls, yoga mats, straps and blocks. Table tennis is available for use when there are no group exercise classes. Male and female locker rooms including showers are available for your convenience and permanent lockers can be rented for an additional fee.

The Fitness Center is your place to work out. It is accessible, affordable, convenient, friendly and hassle free! Come on down for a free tour and orientation to your Fitness Center.

For Details Call  
Allison Miles, Fitness Center Director  
@ (206) 220- 6134  
or E-MAIL: [a90@psc.gov](mailto:a90@psc.gov)

### **NARFE is for All Retirees**

National Association of Retired Federal Employees (NARFE) was founded in February 1921 by 14 federal employees, with the goal to protect the earned retirement benefits of federal annuitants, their spouses, survivors, and families.

While the word "Retired" is in our name, NARFE works for everyone in the federal community - current employees, retirees, spouses, and survivor annuitants. NARFE sponsors and supports legislation and administrative regulations beneficial to present and future federal civilian retirees.

Membership is open to those who have worked for any agency of the Federal or District of Columbia Governments. NARFE membership is open to **current** employees as well as retirees, former employees, spouses, and surviving spouses of persons eligible to join NARFE.